

Fire Marshal Division

Information Bulletin



Decorative Materials In Assembly Occupancies

Decorations are an important part of seasonal activities and events throughout the year. Many decorations can be safely used as long as they comply with the appropriate regulations regarding quantity, placement, and fire resistance. These regulations are intended to maintain a minimum level of safety within your facility and assist you in ensuring materials do not inadvertently jeopardize your customers or staff.

When selecting decorative materials be sure to search for appropriate labeling on the packaging that indicates the fire resistance of the material and any testing that was performed or purchase non-combustible items. Documentation must be maintained on site regarding the resistance of the decorative material. If you cannot verify the resistance of the material it should not be utilized. Some products may be treated in order to achieve a fire resistance rating – carefully review and research any treatment products and understand the steps necessary to verify compliance with the manufacturer of the product.

The information provided within this bulletin is intended to address general requirements related to decorative materials, other than decorative vegetation, in new and existing assembly occupancies. The information below has been summarized from Section 807 of the 2012 International Fire Code.

1. The permissible amount of noncombustible decorative material shall not be limited.
2. Decorative materials required to be flame resistant must meet the testing requirements of NFPA 701 and include testing documentation or appropriate seals, labels, or similar. Adequate documentation must be on site and available upon request.
3. Curtains, draperies, hangings and other decorative materials suspended from walls or ceilings shall meet the flame propagation performance criteria of NFPA 701.
4. The permissible amount of NFPA 701 compliant decorative materials shall not exceed 10 percent of the specific wall or ceiling area to which it is attached.
5. Imitation leather or other material consisting of or coated with pyroxylin or similarly hazardous base shall not be used in Assembly occupancies.
6. Furnishings or decorative materials of an explosive or highly flammable character shall not be used.
7. Fire-retardant coatings in existing buildings shall be maintained so as to retain the effectiveness of the treatment under service conditions encountered in actual use.
8. Furnishings or other objects shall not be placed to obstruct exits, exit access, egress, exit signs, emergency lights, or similar items, or reduce the life safety of the facility.
9. Exposed foam plastic material and unprotected materials containing foam plastic used for decorative purposes or stage scenery or exhibit booths must be tested in accordance with UL 1975 or NFPA 289 and documentation provided for review and approval prior to use.

Please contact the City of Charleston Fire Department – Fire Marshal Division at (843)724-3429 with any questions or for additional information.